
Chapter 13 – Sanctification

1. Those who are effectually called and regenerated, having a new heart and a new spirit created in them, are further sanctified—truly and personally—through the power of Christ’s death and resurrection, by his Word and Spirit dwelling in them. The dominion of the whole body of sin is destroyed, its various lusts are more and more weakened and put to death, and those called and regenerated are more and more enlivened and strengthened in all saving graces, leading to the practice of true holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.

2. This sanctification, although imperfect in this life, is effected in every part of man’s nature. Some remnants of corruption still persist in every part, and so there arises a continual and irreconcilable war—the flesh warring against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh.

3. Although in this war the remaining corruption may strongly prevail for a time, yet, through the continual supply of strength from the sanctifying Spirit of Christ, the regenerate nature overcomes, and so the saints grow in grace, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ,

If you have been in a church for any length of time you will know that we love words ending with ‘tion.’ Election/predestination/regeneration/justification/edification/adoption/mortification/glorification. Well, today we add another ‘tion’ word to that list – sanctification. And **SANCTIFICATION MEANS ‘TO BE MADE HOLY.’**

Sometimes it is used in the Bible interchangeably with justification, because the two are unbreakably connected. But a careful study of the Bible reveals that while our justification is a *one time declaration* of God that we are righteous in His sight, sanctification is a *lifelong process* that begins from that moment until we are with the Lord in heaven.

ROMANS 8:29, does not use the word sanctification but it explains that the end goal of our salvation is that we would be “conformed to the image of His Son,” or made like the Lord Jesus. And this will only be the case, fully, once we are with Him in heaven.

Elsewhere in the Bible we read about the Christian life as a constant *putting off* or *putting to death* of everything that is evil and a *putting on* or *bringing to life* all that is good.

So that is sanctification – the lifelong process of being made holy.

But how exactly does this happen? Is sanctification something that *we* do? Or is it something that is done in us? And if it is done in us, *who* does it and *how* is it done and *what* is our role in it? And these are important questions. There are many commands, even in the NT, about what the Christian life looks like. We have seen in our 1 John studies that if we are adopted sons and daughters of God then we will keep His commandments. Philippians 2:12 says, “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.” So rightly understanding sanctification will help us understand what it means to live the Christian life.

Let’s turn our attention then to Malachi. Malachi was a contemporary of Ezra and Nehemiah. He prophesied *after* the return from exile. The people had returned to Jerusalem full of renewed hope and excitement, but Jerusalem was a shadow of its former glory and the behaviour of the people was the same if not worse than before the exile, with the priests being especially corrupt and immoral. So the prophecies about renewal and Messiah that the Jews had thought would be fulfilled in the return from exile had not come to pass. Thus, the people were *very* discouraged. Enter Malachi.

I. And in these verses, **MALACHI SPEAKS ABOUT THE COMING OF THE MESSIAH**. And he does this by **EXPLAINING THE EVENTS** of His coming, and then by **DESCRIBING THE DUTIES** that He performs. So first of all, Malachi explains the events of Messiah’s coming.

A. And we begin with **THE SPIRITUAL SITUATION IN ISRAEL**.

1. In our **EXODUS 23** reading, we saw that the people of Israel were told about how they were to behave when they arrived at the Promised Land. They were to obey God’s commandments. They were to slowly but completely destroy the inhabitants of the land. They were not to worship the idols of the Canaanites, but instead to destroy them. And if they would do this, the Lord promised to bless them and extend their borders and give them peace.
2. Now, just prior to this, as we read in **EXODUS 19**, God had said to the people, “You shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” So just keep that in mind. Their *calling*.
3. So, fast forward through Israel’s history, had Israel lived up to this high calling? Was she a kingdom of priests and a bright beacon of holiness in a dark world? No she was not. Indeed, the people were so wicked that God had punished them with exile.
4. And if you look at **MALACHI 2:17**, you get a sense of how bad things still were: The prophet puts words on the lips of the people because their behaviour suggests that they think evil is good and that the Lord is OK with it and that they can get away with injustice because God doesn’t appear to do anything about it.
 - a. Now, it’s a bit of a sidetrack, but it was as I was writing this sermon on Thursday that news came through that the government would introduce legislation allowing all those with historical sex convictions as homosexuals to have those convictions wiped from the record. And this is because prior to 1986, homosexual activity was a crime in NZ. But now, according to our law-makers, and many in society, and more and more even in the wider *church!*, homosexual activity is good and to be celebrated. The problem is though that God calls such activity evil. And in terms of “where is the God of justice?” here in NZ, around 50 human beings are killed by way of abortion every day. But the way society looks at it, the economy is growing and there don’t seem to be any lightning bolts coming down from heaven to destroy abortion clinics, so God must not be too bothered about this. How strikingly similar the our world is to the Israel described by Malachi!

B. Well, Malachi moves on to the **SOLUTION** with v1 of ch. 3.

1. The Lord says, “Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me.”
 - a. Now, just a couple of quick observations about this messenger before we proceed on. The messenger spoken of here is **JOHN THE BAPTIST**. And we know this because in the Gospels Jesus speaks of JtB as the fulfilment of this verse. So the Lord’s great work of salvation would begin with John the Baptist preparing the way by preaching repentance and telling the people that Messiah was coming.

- b. But I wonder also if you noticed the similarity between this verse and how our **EXODUS 23** reading began? Just look at v1 while I read Exodus 23:20, “Behold, I send an angel before you to guard you on the way and to bring you to the place that I have prepared.” And the word angel in Exodus translates the same Greek word translated as messenger in Malachi. So, in Exodus, God would make His people a kingdom of priests by sending an angel/messenger who would go before them as God achieved a great victory that would bring them into the Promised Land. But we know from the history of Israel and these words of Malachi that arrival in the PL was another of those OT **TYPES** that ultimately pointed forward to a much greater fulfillment in the NT. The kingdom of priests truly comes into existence as a messenger prepares the way for the *greatest* victory of God, which makes it possible for God’s people to enter the *ultimate* Promised Land of heaven. This is another beautiful example of what we call the progress of revelation – those incredible links between the OT and the NT that can only be seen and understood in the Lord Jesus Christ.
2. And this **MUCH GREATER VICTORY** is what is described in the rest of v1, “And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to His temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, He is coming, says the LORD of hosts.” And with these words, Malachi speaks of the coming of the Lord Jesus – the ‘Lord,’ the ‘MotC,’ is the Lord Jesus.
- a. You see, the **LAW** and the punishment of exile could never make God’s people perfectly obedient. The law could not make them a kingdom of priests. The way that God’s people become the kingdom of priests He desires them to be is through the Lord Jesus. He must *obey* what they cannot obey. He must *give them His righteous*. He must become the *power* for their thankful obedience.

You might think if you look at the word sanctification that the middle of sanctification is the letter ‘f’ ☺ But it is not. The middle of sanctification is the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is only by the *gospel* that we become a kingdom of priests. It is only as we look in faith to the Lord Jesus Christ that we will be made holy.

II. So Malachi has **EXPLAINED THE EVENTS** of the coming of Messiah but now with the remainder of this passage he **DESCRIBES THE DUTIES** that Messiah performs. “But who can endure the day of His coming, and who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner’s fire and like fullers’ soap. He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, and they will bring offerings in righteousness to the LORD.”

- A. Now, the duties of Messiah have the “**SONS OF LEVI**” in view. And the sons of Levi were the OT priests of Israel. But the NT helps us understand that it is not just the OT priests in view here.
1. In **GALATIANS 3**, Paul says to believers, “For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God ... There is neither Jew nor Greek.” So God’s salvation plan now includes Jew and Gentile.
 2. And in terms of the **PRIESTS**, remember our earlier reading from 1 Peter 2, where Peter said to *all* believers, “You yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood.”
 3. So this is another example of how we read the OT with NT glasses on and the NT with OT glasses on. The NT helps us see that Malachi is describing all those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, who become, because they belong to Christ, His kingdom of priests.

- B. And the work that Messiah does in His people is to **REFINE AND PURIFY** them. We read of the Refiner’s fire and Fuller’s soap.
1. In OT times and still today, **METALWORKERS** would pour metal into a superhot oven. It would melt and the impurities in the metal would rise to the top and be scraped off until there was only pure metal left. And what’s fascinating is that the metalworker knew that he had only pure metal left when the surface was like a mirror and he could see his reflection in it. What a beautiful illustration of sanctification! The Lord Jesus works to scrape away the impurities of sin that cling to us until He can see in us a perfect reflection of Himself!
 2. **FULLER’S SOAP** was similar. Fulling was cleaning clothes. So a soap-like product would be put into water and then clothes would be immersed and removed and beaten and scrubbed until all the dirt was separated from the clothes and they were clean.
- C. Now, it is **QUITE ON PURPOSE THAT THESE IMAGES USE A SUPERHOT FIRE AND IMMERSION IN WATER AND BEATING AND SCRUBBING AS HOW PURIFICATION OCCURS**. That tells us something about work that needs to be done in us.
1. In our earlier reading from 1 Peter 2, believers are described as a “spiritual house.” Well, perhaps you have seen those TV reality shows about **HOARDERS**? You know, those people who have houses full of junk and animal faeces and mouldy food scraps all over the place. It’s just disgusting! Well, we are a ‘house’ like that when we first come to faith in Christ. We are in desperate need of cleaning and repair and rubbish removal.
 - a. And it is the Lord Jesus who does this work within us. **EPHESIANS 5:25-27**, “Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her, *that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that He might present the church to Himself in splendour, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.*”
 - b. And that passage explains how it is that Christ accomplishes this work of refining and purifying and cleansing – it is with the word. And that is a kind of shorthand for what we find throughout the NT, which is the Spirit and the Word. Christ refines and purifies and cleanses His people as they read or hear His Word and as the Holy Spirit applies the word in them.
 - (1). If we go back to the house cleaning image of a moment ago, the Spirit of Christ goes from room to room doing His work:
 - (a). In the **library**, which is the mind, He finds rubbish and all sorts of worthless things, which He proceeds to throw out and replace with the truth of Scripture.
 - (b). In the **dining room** of our appetites He finds many sinful desires to do with earthly things that He replaces with healthy appetites to do with heavenly things.
 - (c). He opens the **storage cupboards** and removes such things as pride, materialism, and lust, and He puts in humility, meekness, love, and all the other virtues for which believers are to hunger and thirst.
 - (d). He goes through the **living room** of fellowship, where He finds many worldly friends and activities, and He gives us a longing for the fellowship of believers and spiritual disciplines like prayer and Bible study and worship and evangelism.
 - (e). He goes into the **workshop**, where only toys are being made, and He leads us into practical acts of kindness and service.
 - (f). And He takes **the portion of the whole house** that used to be devoted to leisure and entertainment, and He gradually makes the area smaller and smaller.

- (g). And the **large windows** that once looked out on the TV screen, He either boards up or replaces with much smaller ones that only open for a short time.
- (2). I trust we get the picture! And if you have ever watched one of those hoarding documentaries, you will know that the clean up process is extremely painful for the hoarder. They find it very hard to let anything go. But once the house is clean, we hear about things like better health for the one who used to hoard and estranged relationships restored, etc. Well, the process of sanctification is often like this also. There can be possessions that the Holy Spirit needs to pry out of our clenched hands and secret sins that He has to chisel off the walls of our hearts. But brothers and sisters, young people and boys and girls, our quote from Ephesians 5 a few moments ago said that Christ sanctifies us “so that He might present the church to Himself in splendour, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.” We don’t *lose* with sanctification, we only *gain*.
- D. And finally, we see something about **OUR ROLE IN THE PROCESS OF SANCTIFICATION** in v4, Once the Lord Jesus comes and refines and purifies, “then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the Lord as in the days of old and as in former years.”
1. And this language of “offerings” and the “kingdom of priests” or “holy priesthood” language we have read of help us see that we have an important part to play in the process of sanctification. Turn with me to **TITUS 2:11-13** as we close (p.998). This passage is a wonderful NT reflection of this our Malachi passage. We read, “For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people.” What Malachi spoke of as future has now occurred with the first coming of the Lord Jesus. And we become a holy priesthood as we believe in Him and His work. But what does He continuing to do by His Spirit? “Training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age.” So you and me are to use the commands in Scripture to grow in godliness. But the fuel or the power for the source of godliness is not in ourselves. So we live this way, “waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us *to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for Himself* a people for His own possession who are zealous for good works.”

The middle *and* the beginning *and* the end of sanctification is the Lord Jesus. Yes, we are to “work out [our] salvation with fear and trembling.” But as Philippians continues, “It is God who works in you.” Praise God for that we are purified priests who have the Spirit of Christ at work in us. And may knowing this motivate us to live lives worthy of the One who loves us and the One whom we love. Amen.